

THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Donald P. Gregg
Assistant to the Vice President
For National Security Affairs

FROM: David D. Gries
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SUBJECT: Your Request for an Assessment of
Sino-Soviet Relations

1. China and the Soviet Union are embarking on a third attempt to repair relations since the Sino-Soviet split of 1960.

- In 1969, Kosygin and Zhou Enlai discussed normalizing state-to-state relations in a meeting at Beijing airport.
- In 1979, political talks were resumed in the wake of Mao's death two and one half years earlier but were suspended following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.
- In 1982, political talks at the Vice Foreign Minister level (Qian Qichen-Leonid Ilichev) were again started in Beijing. These were given internal policy justification in a classified Hu Yaobang speech of March 1981.

2. The Chinese have several reasons for again starting political talks aimed at normalizing state-to-state relations.

- They have felt disadvantaged in the strategic triangle between Moscow, Beijing, and Washington. They have been uncertain about US intentions toward them in the past two years and recognize that improving relations with Moscow puts pressure on the US to show flexibility in dealings with Beijing and caution in dealings with Taiwan.
- They recognize that reducing tensions along the Sino-Soviet border reduces pressure for military modernization, gives them a freer hand to pursue economic development, and increases pressure on Vietnam to accept a political settlement in Kampuchea.
- Resuming a dialogue with Moscow provides the Chinese with a channel that could be used in the event of unforeseen outcomes during a Soviet succession struggle. Such talks also encourage Brezhnev's successors to adopt a less hostile policy toward the PRC.

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- For at least 18 months the Chinese have pursued a more independent, foreign policy line. Moderate improvement of Sino-Soviet relations is a natural outgrowth of this effort to gain greater strategic flexibility.

3. The Soviets also have good reason to pursue normalization.

- Their overriding objective is to prevent closer Sino-US ties, and they also believe that strains in US-Chinese relations give them an opportunity to improve their position by moving somewhat closer to China.
- They view Deng Xiaoping as a realist who might make adjustments favorable to Moscow and thus hope for results while Deng remains in charge.
- Like the Chinese the Soviets want to position themselves to exploit a possible power struggle during a Chinese succession.

4. A marked reduction in propaganda by both sides has improved the climate for negotiations. Moreover, the Chinese probably feel relatively secure, having just signed a communique with the US. In addition, Soviet interest in repairing the relationship is stronger now — as Brezhnev demonstrated in his speech on 27 October — because of incentives provided by continuing strains in US-Soviet relations.

5. The Soviets have some attractive options which might encourage the Chinese: they could withdraw the division they introduced into Mongolia in 1979, citing the precedent of past troop withdrawals from East Germany. However, long lines of communications into southern Siberia will limit Soviet willingness to make sizeable withdrawals. Brezhnev may have been hinting at troop reductions in his 27 October speech.

6. There is a range of possible outcomes to this third attempt to normalize Sino-Soviet relations:

- The negotiations now underway in Beijing will almost certainly lead to partial normalization of state to state relations expressed in confidence building measures: cultural agreements; expanded trade; increased exchanges of delegations; sports activities; student exchanges; joint scientific research; and the like.
- If both sides are satisfied with partial normalization, then a resumption of party to party contacts is probable. Such a step is suggested by the Chinese decision to normalize relations with the French Communist Party, the most pro-Soviet Communist Party in Western Europe.
- Resumption of party contacts would be a likely precondition for modest troop withdrawals along the Sino-Soviet border and for gestures in Vietnam and Afghanistan.
- An unlikely outcome at least for the foreseeable future is full normalization of state and party relations, including significant troop withdrawals from the Sino-Soviet border area.

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7. Implications for the US

- For the US to benefit from the triangular relationship among Washington, Moscow and Beijing, US-China and US-Soviet relations must be better than Sino-Soviet relations. The continued coolness in US-Soviet and US-PRC ties could be moving us into a situation of reduced benefits, since any improvement in relations between Beijing and Moscow is automatically translated into a loss of US flexibility in the triangular relationship.
- In the likely circumstances of partial normalization of state-to-state relations, US loss of flexibility is likely to damage but not destroy the strategic relationship between Washington and Beijing.
- Realization of the probable outcome of a resumption of state and party relations would change the security environment for the US and its allies in East Asia. Japan is likely to want renewed assurances from the US in the security realm. Vietnam may become highly unnerved by the prospect of a Sino-Soviet reconciliation.
- There are limits, however, on how far the Chinese are likely to go in improving relations with Moscow. Just as they felt disadvantaged on the strategic triangle between Washington, Moscow, and Beijing when in 1979 they moved close to Washington, so they would feel equally disadvantaged in moving too close to Moscow.
- In these circumstances, the US in the years ahead is likely to be faced with an independent, nationalist China poised midway between Washington and Moscow. This will complicate but not destroy US relations with Beijing.



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